Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1-5.   (canceled)

6.   (currently amended) The communication connection merge method as set forth in claim 24, wherein said ~~connection-oriented~~ network is a multi-protocol label switching network, said communication connections are label switched paths, and said node is a label switching router.

7.   (currently amended) The communication connection merge method as set forth in claim 24, wherein said ~~connection-oriented~~ network is an asynchronous transfer mode network, said communication connections are virtual channels, and said tunneling communication connection is a virtual path, and said node is an asynchronous transfer mode switch.

8-14.   (canceled)

15.   (currently amended) A node which consolidates communication connections in a ~~connection-oriented~~ network, comprising:

a processor ~~which determines~~ to:

determine whether a tunneling communication connection is present both in a first route of an existing communication connection and in a second route of a second communication connection, wherein said first and second routes have different destination nodes in said ~~connection-oriented~~ network, [[;]]

~~wherein said processor modifies~~ temporarily modify a parameter of said tunneling communication connection to accommodate merging said second communication connection in said tunneling communication connection, [[; and]]

send a modification request to another node associated with the tunneling communication connection,

receive a modification response from the other node that indicates whether modification of the parameter is possible at the other node,

fixedly modify the parameter, at the node, when modification of the parameter is possible at the other node, and

~~wherein said processor merges~~ merge said existing communication connection and said second communication connection on said tunneling communication connection when modification of the parameter is possible at the other node.

16.   (canceled)

17.   (currently amended) The node as set forth in claim 15, wherein said ~~connection-oriented~~ network is a multi-protocol label switching network, said

communication connections are label switched paths, and said node is a label switching router.

18.   (currently amended) The node as set forth in claim 15, wherein said connection-oriented network is an asynchronous transfer mode network, said communication connection is a virtual channel and said tunneling communication connection is a virtual path, and said node is an asynchronous transfer mode switch.

19.   (previously presented) The node of claim 15, wherein said processor creates a tunneling communication connection capable of accommodating said existing communication connection, wherein said tunneling communication connection is in said first route and said second route.

20-22. (canceled)

23.   (previously presented) The node of claim 19, wherein said second communication connection is a new communication connection.

24.   (currently amended) A communication merge method in a connection-oriented network which consolidates an existing communication connection, comprising:

determining whether a tunneling communication connection is present in both a first route to a first destination node with a second communication connection having a

second route to a second destination node in said ~~connection-oriented~~ network, wherein

said first node and said second node are different nodes, and wherein a plurality of nodes

are associated with the tunneling communication connect;

temporarily modifying a parameter of said tunneling communication connection

to accommodate a merger of said communication connections, if said tunneling

communication connection is present; [[and]]

sending a parameter modification request from one of the nodes to at least one

other one of the nodes;

receiving, from the at least one other one of the nodes, a parameter modification

response that indicates whether modification of the parameter is possible at the at least

one other one of the nodes;

fixedly modifying the parameter of the tunneling communication connection

when modification of the parameter is possible at the at least one other one of the nodes;

and

merging said communication connections on said tunneling communication

connection based on the fixedly modified parameter.

25.   (canceled)

26.   (previously presented) The communication merge method of claim 24,

wherein said method further comprises:

creating a new tunneling communication connection from a third node to a fourth

node, wherein said third and fourth nodes are in said first route and second route, if said

tunneling communication connection is not present.

27.   (previously presented) The communication merge method of claim 26,

wherein said second communication connection is a new communication connection.

28.   (previously presented) The communication merge method of claim 24,

wherein said method further comprises:

stacking a label assigned for the tunneling communication connection in a shim

header.

29.   (currently amended) The communication merge method of claim 24,

further comprising:

determining, at a node within the tunneling communication connection one of the

at least one other one of the nodes, if modification of the parameter is possible; and

temporarily setting, by the one of the at least one other one of the nodes, the

modification of the parameter when modification of the parameter at the at least one other

one of the nodes node is possible.

30-34. (canceled)

35.   (currently amended) A node that consolidates communication connections in a connection-oriented network that includes a plurality of nodes, comprising:

a processor to:

determine whether a tunneling communication connection is present both in a first route of an existing communication connection and in a second route of a second communication connection, the first and second routes being associated with different destination nodes in the connection-oriented network,

determine if modification of a parameter of the tunneling communication connection to accommodate merging the second communication connection in the tunneling communication connection is possible based on a message from at least one other node, and

temporarily set the modification of the parameter when modification of the parameter is determined to be possible,

send a parameter modification request to another node associated with the tunneling communication connection,

receive a parameter modification response from the other node, the parameter modification response indicating whether modification of the parameter is possible at the other node, and

when modification of the parameter is determined to be possible at the other node, fixedly modify the parameter and merge the existing communication connection and the second communication connection on the tunneling communication connection.

36.   (canceled)

37.   (canceled)

38.   (new) A node that consolidates communication connections in a network that includes a plurality of nodes, comprising:

a processor to:

determine whether a common communication connection is present both in a first route of a first communication connection and in a second route of a second communication connection, the first and second routes being associated with different destination nodes in the network,

determine if modification of a parameter of the common communication connection to accommodate merging the first and second communication connections in the common communication connection is possible,

temporarily set the modification of the parameter when modification of the parameter is determined to be possible,

send a parameter modification request to another node associated with the common communication connection,

receive a parameter modification response from the other node, the parameter modification response indicating whether modification of the parameter at the other node is possible, and

when modification of the parameter is possible at the other node, fixedly

modify the parameter at the node and merge the first and second communication

connections in the common communication connection.